ON THE DATE OF THE KHAZARS' CONVERSION TO JUDAISM AND THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE KINGS OF THE RUS OLEG AND IGOR

A Study of the Anonymous Khazar *Letter* from the Genizah of Cairo

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Persée creative commons

An anonymous Hebrew letter from the Genizah of Cairo, now in Cambridge, describes a recent raid by the Rus[1] on the Byzantine territory which resembles in detail the well-known attack of 941. The writer presents himself as a subject of Joseph, the king of Khazars at the time of the raid, and thus as a contemporary of the event. He names the king of the Rus before and during the raid Helgo or Helgu — read Helgi — which is the original Scandinavian form of the name of the King of the Rus Oleg. Yet Oleg, according to the chronology of the Russian *Primary Chronicle*, had been dead in 941 for almost thirty years.

Since first edited by Solomon Schechter in 1912,[2] the *Letter* presented the students of ancient Russian history with a difficult challenge. Most simply chose to ignore its existence. Others claimed that the *Letter* is a modern fake and whatever evidence produced to support it had been faked as well; one did

1. The term Rus designates in this study the predominantly Scandinavian warriors and traders who subjugated eastern Slavic and Finno-Baltic tribes in the eighth-tenth centuries. The adjective Russian is applied to the state which emerged from the amalgamation of the Rus and the conquered tribes and which was, starting from the mid-tenth century, increasingly Slavic in character. It is also used to designate ancient Russian sources. In preferring the adjective form Russian to the neologism Rus'ian or alike, I obviously do not mean to exclude from the heritage of the Rus and of the ancient "Russian" state the modern-day Ukraine and Belarus.

2. S. Schechter, An Unknown Khazar Document, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, N. S. 3, 1912/3, p. 182-219.

Revue des Études Byzantines 53, 1995, p. 237-270.

not bother to check the manuscript.[3] Even scholars who gave closer attention to the text were often sceptical. They contested the writer's claim to be a contemporary of the events described; or, if a contemporary, he was accused of mixing them all up. But efforts were also made to accomodate for his data. Wars unattested to in other sources were inserted at convenient dates, and the shaky edifice of the Russian chronicles' chronology was shattered even more. It has been long admitted though, for reasons independent of the *Genizah Letter*, that the chronology of the chronicles is, for the period in question, largely artificial.

The students of Khazar history treated the *Genizah Letter* with misgivings of their own. They noticed discrepancies, notably in the description of the Khazars' conversion to Judaism, between the *Letter* and the text which had long become the cornerstone of all research in the field, the *Reply* of Khazar King Joseph to the Jewish courtier of the caliphs of Cordova, Hasdai ibn Shaprut (ca 905-975). The latter source, known in two versions, is generally recognized as problematic. Yet the version which is now called the Short, was printed as early as 1577; the Long version, incomplete at the end but more elaborate on several points, was published in 1879.[4] The authority of the *Reply* being firmly established, the author of the *Genizah Letter* was taxed with omission and neglect when his description of the events was found to be somewhat different.[5]

The *Letter*'s data on the Khazars and the Rus are so closely interwoven, however, that they can only be judged jointly, on the basis of a comprehensive examination of the source.

In this study I suggest a way out of the present disarray. First, the *Letter*'s survey of the Khazar history is examined and confronted with evidence available from other sources. This exercise confirms the value of the *Letter*'s account of the Khazars' conversion to Judaism and corroborates its version of

3. H. Grégoire, Le "Glozel" khazare, *Byz.* 12, 1937, p. 225-266, see p. 242-248. Grégoire mitigated his scepticism in subsequent publications.

4. Both versions, together with the initial letter of Hasdai to the king, a short commentary and a Russian translation, were edited anew by P. K. Kokovcov, *Evrejsko-hazarskaja perepiska v X veke*, Leningrad 1932, who presents the previous editions. Kokovcov also edited twice and translated into Russian the *Genizah Letter*: first in "Novyj evrejskij dokument o hazarah i hazaro-russko-vizantijskih otnošenijah v X v.", *ZMNP,* November 1913, p. 150-172, and then in the volume cited.

5. See, notably, D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, Princeton 1954, p. 161: the *Letter*'s "garbled account of the conversion" makes "one feel bound to regard its other data, e. g., the wars of the Khazars in the 9th and 10th centuries (...) with increased caution". The different approaches to the *Letter* are discussed below, although it is not my purpose to resume them all or to provide a comprehensive bibliography on the key issues of the Khazar and the Russian history on which I will have the occasion to touch. Reasoned bibliographical surveys are available in I. Sorlin, Le problème des Khazares et les historiens soviétiques dans les vingt dernières années, *TM* 3, 1968, p. 423-455; A. P. Novosel'cev, *Hazarskoe gosudarstvo i ego rol' v istorii Vostočnoj Evropy i Kavkaza*, Moscow 1990, p. 5-66; cf. P. B. Golden, The Khazars, in D. Sinor (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, Cambridge 1990, p. 263-270, 466-478.

the more recent events. It involves a revision of the commonly accepted date(s) of the conversion. In the second part of this study, the traditional dates of the Russian chronicles for King Oleg and for his successor, Igor, are revised in their turn. While the impetus for the revision comes from the *Genizah Letter*, I hope to be able to show that an attentive new reading of the chronicles provides a basis for a new firm chronology.

a. The *Genizah Letter*: some preliminary remarks

The *Genizah Letter* was recently edited anew by Norman Golb, with an historical commentary by Omeljan Pritsak.[6] Golb presents a much improved reading and reconstruction of the text as well as an exact translation in English which I quote or paraphrase below. (In a couple of cases, though, my reconstruction of damaged passages differs from Golb's.[7]) The editor's paleographic analysis sets the manuscript in the late eleventh century.[8] Thus the copy of the text which came to us is probably not removed from the events that it describes by more than a century and a half.

The beginning and the end of the *Letter* are lost and so are the names of the writer and the addressee. Its contents, however, present the writer as a Jewish Khazar, subject of King Joseph whom he calls his lord.[9] As for the addressee, an important observation by Golb makes certain what was before a learned guess. The Khazar King Joseph was known to scholars from his exchange of letters with Hasdai ibn Shaprut of Cordova. In the missive to Joseph which provoked the famous *Reply*, Hasdai tells of his long-standing interest in Khazaria and of his efforts to obtain information about it. The aim of our *Letter* is to satisfy this kind of curiosity. Hasdai describes the futile attempt of his emissary, Isaac bar Nathan, to secure assistance at the Byzantine court in order to reach Khazaria. The *Letter* is destined for a person, living in a country on the Mediterranean, whose "messengers" are said to be visiting Constantinople (fol. 2v, 17-18). Ever since its initial publication, therefore, it has been assumed that the *Letter*'s addressee was none other than Hasdai ibn Shaprut. Now Golb has shown that the two folios which contain this text belong to the same codex as another letter, from Provence, which was clearly intended for Hasdai.[10]

The Genizah collection in Cambridge contains fragments of five letters to and from Hasdai ibn Shaprut originating in three different codices. They seem to be linked in one way or another to Hasdai's diplomatic activities on behalf of the caliph of Cordova, but their main common ground is Hasdai's continuous involvement with Jewish communities outside Andalusia. Golb

6. N. Golb and O. Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, Ithaca-London 1982, p. 75-156. Each author being responsible for a separate section of the work, they are referred to separately below. The text of the *Letter*, with a facing translation, occupies p. 106-121 and will be cited by the folio and the line.

7. See below, n. 19 and 72.

8. Golb (cited n. 6), p. 94-95.

9. Fol. 2r, 15-16; 17. Khazaria is for the author "our land": fol. 1r, 19; 2v, 15; 20.

10. Golb (cited n. 6), p. 90-95.

suggests that these collections of Hasdai's correspondence — or are those rather copies of one and the same collection? — were originally prepared by Hasdai's secretary, Menahem ibn Saruq. Three of these letters — very little is left of the fourth — are so specific in the matters discussed that one would never suspect a forgery. This is notably the case of the letter from Provence which is coupled with the Khazar *Letter*. Thus the *Letter*'s manuscript "convoy" enhances its authenticity.

This argument is not new. With much poorer manuscript evidence at hand, it had been advanced by Mikhail I. Artamonov.[11] It is worth repeating though, since it seems to have escaped the most recent student of the text, Anatolij P. Novosel'cev. Novosel'cev admits the *Letter* as a tenth-century document yet, disturbed by the appearance of the Russian King Oleg, claims that the author "displaces the real historical facts rather freely". He affirms that the text was actually produced after the collapse of the Khazar state in 969 and not, as the author implies throughout, when this state was at the height of its power. Novosel'cev alleges the following proof of the author's confused way of dealing with the facts: "... in one place, the author calls King Joseph, apparently the last Khazar ruler, his lord (*adonai*), yet at the end of the treatise, he addresses some other lord of his (*adoni*) and tells him what any Khazar should have known in any case. It is remarkable that the author of the treatise then mentions the messengers of this second lord." Novosel'cev concludes that the author "found a new lord after the destruction of the Kaghanate (...), perhaps a head of one of the Jewish communities in Byzantium, and composed at his request, from memory, from rumors and partly from books, a kind of memo on Khazaria."[12] Rather than taking the author for a schizophrenic, however, who could boast as present and real the power of a people dispersed and of a state which had just been destroyed, I would cast in doubt Novosel'cev's understanding of the *Letter*'s Hebrew. *Adoni*, "my lord", is the way the author refers to his king in narrating the events of his reign. Then, in speaking to his addressee, he uses the most common and neutral form of polite address which is *adoni*, "my lord". The latter meaning escaped Novosel'cev.[13] An English-speaker can imagine the discoveries one can make by applying, regardless of the context, a single meaning of the word lord to all its uses in a medieval text. So it is also in Hebrew. The theory of the author's two lords can, therefore, be discarded as an obvious lapse.

The *Letter*'s actual date belongs about twenty years before the fall of Khazaria. It was produced on the occasion of Hasdai's emissary's visit to the Byzantine capital which, in its turn, had for occasion the diplomatic exchange between Caliph of Cordova 'Abd ar-Rahmân III and Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Marius Canard dates the arrival of the Arab legation which included Hasdai's man of confidence, Isaac bar Nathan, in the

11. M. I. Artamonov, *Istorija Hazar*, Leningrad 1962, p. 12.

12. Novosel'cev (cited n. 5), p. 216-218, cf. p. 7-8.

13. As it escaped Kokovcov 1932 (cited n. 4), p. xxviii, whose hesitant remark on the two lords in the *Letter* is developed by Novosel'cev into the main argument against the text's historical credibility. Curiously enough, Novosel'cev transcribes one and the same form first as *adonai*, which means God, and then, correctly, as *adoni*.

second half of 948. Isaac stayed in Constantinople for at least six months.[14] Thus the *Genizah Letter* can be dated ca 949. King Joseph's *Reply* to Hasdai was probably written five to seven years later.[15]

b. The Khazars' "return" to Judaism. The competition of faiths

The beginning of the *Genizah Letter* is missing, but the loss may not be extensive since the fragment preserved starts with the arrival of Jews in Khazaria. The author states that the Jews came there from Armenia fleeing before the idol-worshippers whose yoke they were unable to bear. The idol-worshippers might well be Christians who, unlike Muslims, were often reproached by Jewish polemists for worshipping images created by their own hands. In any case, the flight of Jews to Khazaria must have preceded the Muslim conquest of Armenia in the late seventh century. We are then probably in the position to guess what had provoked it. In 628 Byzantium defeated Persia, with a crucial help from the Turks who invaded Persian Transcaucasia through the Caspian Gates,[16] from a region which, in the next few decades, was to become the nucleus of independent Khazaria. In 630-632, Emperor Heraclius decreed the forced conversion to Christianity of all Jews in his realm; this was the first such attempt in the history of the Christian Empire.[17] No wonder that the Jews of Armenia fled behind the Caucasus, taking the route shown by the Turkic invadors.[18]

The *Letter* states that the Khazars received the newcomers well, but the latter had lost, apparently while fleeing, the written Law and so it happened that they kept but the most rudimentary elements of the Jewish observance: the circumcision and, for some of them, also Sabbath. Meanwhile, they "intermarried with the inhabitants of the land" and "became one people".[19]

14. M. Canard in A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les arabes*, II, 1, Brussels 1968, p. 322-332; cf. E. Levi-Provencal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, II, Paris 1950, p. 144-153, who dates the exchange of embassies in 947-949.

15. Hasdai's letter was delivered to King Joseph through Central Europe, the Rus and the Volga Bulgars, and it has been plausibly suggested that its dispatch was facilitated by 'Abd ar-Rahmân's diplomatic exchanges with the German King Otto I in the early 950s, see Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 136-137.

16. Background and references in C. Zuckerman, La petite Augusta et le Turc. Epiphania-Eudocie sur les monnaies d'Héraclius, *Revue numismatique* 37, 1995.

17. See G. Dagron, in G. Dagron and V. Deroche, Juifs et Chrétiens dans l'Orient du VII[e] siècle, *TM* 11, 1991, p. 17-273, see p. 28-38.

18. Pritsak (cited n. 6), p. 130, suggests that the Jewish refugies came from Palestine after its conquest by the Persians in 614 and fled *through* Armenia to the Khazars. I find it rather implausible. The political aspirations nurished by Jews in Jerusalem after the eviction of the Christian Empire were harshly repressed by the Persians (see Dagron, cited n. 17, p. 22-28), but there was no question of persecuting the Jewish religion. The search for an earlier occasion for the Jewish flight is limited by the fact that the Khazar presence in the Caspian steppe is only securely attested to from the late sixth century.

19. The editor restitutes the mutilated beginning of the text: "] Armenia, and [our] fathers fled before (...) the idol-worshippers, and [the people of Qazari]a received them. For the pe[ople] of Qazaria were at first without Torah, while [their neighbour Armenia] remained (*wayisha'ar[u shkeneyhem arminia]*) without Torah and writing. They inter-

The Khazars did not have a king at the time but would appoint whomever they found successful in battle as commander-in-chief. Once the Jews joined them for a campaign, as was their custom — the author forgets that the Jews were completely integrated with the Khazars by then — and a Jewish officer achieved a major victory. He was appointed commander-in-chief and kept this position for a long time. The only sign of his Judaism was, initially, that he was circumcised. Then God, acting through the chief's wife, Serah, and her righteous father, stirred his heart to "return" to the full Jewish observance. This decision irritated the Byzantine and the Arab rulers who took action to incite the other officers of Khazaria against Judaism. The commander-in-chief initiated in response a competition of faiths. The Byzantine and the Arab rulers dispatched their wise men and also the sages of Israel volunteered to participate. The Jews prevailed in the ensuing disputation, helped by their holy books which could be procured from a cave, in the valley of Tizul, just when some point in the argument could not otherwise be resolved. "Then returned Israel, with the people of Khazaria, (to Judaism) completely".[20]

The author constantly uses the terms of "return" (*Ishuba*) which designate the repentance of Jews who strayed away from their ancestral law. He avoids any notion of convertion. This brings him to contradictions since he must still occasionally distinguish between Jews and Khazars, allegedly "one people". What is more, he makes the Khazars "return" to what they have never been. Scholars notice this concept, peculiar to the *Letter*, of the Khazars' intrinsic Jewishness yet often miss its halakic point. The Jewish law considers a convert as a new-born, with no links left to his people and to his family of origin. Thus, given that the spread of Judaism among the Khazars was, in reality, more gradual and slow than the *Letter* would admit (though in no way limited to the upper class),[21] applying the proper halakic notion of conversion to this process would split the people and the clans. Declaring all Khazars to be Jews from birth was, by contrast, a not very elegant in historian's view but a practical way to save the cohesion of the Khazar people. The existing links remained valid regardless of the fact whether one or other Khazar "returned" or not to his "ancestral" rite.

The competition of faiths is central to the *Letter*'s historical survey. It opens the way for the Judaisation of the Khazars and thus is, as we will see, at the origin of a lasting animosity between Khazaria and Byzantium. Fortunately, we have also the Byzantine view of the disputation which goes back to a personal account by the Christian protagonist, the future apostle to the Slavs Constantine-Cyril. There is no need to dwell on the background and

married with the inhabitants of the land" etc. (fol. Ir, 1-4). The restitution [their neighbour Armenia] would place the flight of the Jews before the creation of Armenian alphabet, that is at least two centuries before the Khazars first appear in the region, thus depriving the tradition of any claim to historicity. What is more, this restitution is awkward in Hebrew and does not fit the syntax: it does not provide, as it should, the subject of the next phrase. Restitute instead: "and remained [there our fathers as well] (*wayisha'ar[u sham gam abo[enu]*) without Torah and writing and intermarried" etc.

20. Fol. Ir, 7-Iv, 13. On the holy books episode, see below, p. 244.

21. See the recent review of the question by Golb (cited n. 6), p. 24-32.

value of the Slavonic *Life of Constantine*. Held in mistrust by some ninteenth-century critics because of its late manuscript tradition, this text is now recognized as a first-rate historical document written shortly after the saint's death (869), in any case before 882.[22] On the Khazar mission, it quotes profusely Constantine's own written discourses which were translated in Slavonic by his brother Methodius and which are now lost.[23] Methodius, who had accompanied Constantine to the kaghan's court, outlived his younger brother by many years and is presumed to be the source of much of the information in the *Life*.

Produced by missionaries who failed in their mission, this account is openly biased. There is not a word on the Khazars' eventual conversion to Judaism and in all the disputations, which are reported at length, Constantine has the upper hand. Yet the *Life*, as a contemporary biography, does not feature miracles which did not happen. When Jews and Muslims are defeated point by point and Constantine exhorts the Khazars with tears to accept the baptism or to face the consequences at the Last Judgement, his appeal results in an anti-climax. The Khazars procrastinate. It turns out that those carried by Constantine's sermon count no more than two hundred; they are allowed to be baptized. Otherwise, the kaghan expresses a polite hope that he might eventually see the light, promisses Constantine to execute without delay those "who make the Jewish prayer or stick to the Saracen faith" – this might be the hagiographer's only factual lie — and sends him home with an admirative attestation for his emperor and two hundred liberated Greek prisoners as a bonus.

The *Genizah Letter* and the *Life* are biased each in its own way and yet both accord a crucial weight to the competition of faiths. The *Letter* presents it as a major diplomatic event to which the Byzantine and the Arab kings send representatives of their religions. For the chief officer, the vindication of his faith in a disputation is the only way to overcome the internal opposition to the "return" to Judaism. The *Life* describes, for its part, the arrival of the kaghan's ambassadors to the emperor. The Khazars announce that they confess one God and turn to the east while praying – traits which convince the author of the *Life* of their affinity with the Christians, just as a Jew could take them for a proof of their primitive Judaism[24] — but are now exhorted by Jews and Saracens to adopt their respective faith and customs. The ambassadors profess their respect for the Christian Empire and invite it to be

22. P. MEYVAERT and P. DEVOS, Trois énigmes cyrillo-méthodiennes de la "Légende Italique" résolues grâce à un document inédit, *An. Boll.* 73, 1955, p. 375-461, see p. 433-440.

23. *Life of Constantine the Philosopher*, VIII-XI, ed. B. St. Angelov and H. Kodov, in KLIMENT OHRIDSKI, *S'brani s'činenija*, III, Sofia 1973, p. 95-103.

24. J. MARQUART, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge*, Leipzig 1903 (reprint Darmstadt 1961), p. 15, comments on this passage that the envoys describe the worship of the Turkic god Tengri which involved turning to the east. On the monotheistic traits of this cult, cf. J.-P. ROUX, Tängri. Essai sur le ciel-dieu des peuples altaïques, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 149, 1956, p. 49-82, 197-230; 150, 1956, p. 27-54, 173-208.

represented vowing a fair play: if its envoy prevails, the Khazars undertake to embrace Christianity.

Two minor details enhance the parallelism between the two accounts. According to the *Life*, Constantine confronts, before his official Jewish opponents, a local "shrewd man". The man objects to the way the Byzantines appoint their kings from different families, as opposed to "us", the Khazars, who keep one and the same family in power. His other reproach concerns the way the Christians use books in disputation, hold them in hands and take pride in them. As for us, he claims, we carry the wisdom inside, as if having swallowed it. Constantine knocks him down with a simple question — how many generations there were from Adam to Moses and how many years each generation lasted? — which the man is unable to answer.[25] If he is a Khazar though, why should he know the biblical generations? If he is a Jew, why this disdain for books? The answer can be found in the *Genizah Letter*. Constantine met, no doubt, one of the Khazar Jews who held to a rudimentary bookless form of Judaism before the "return" to the proper Jewish observance.

In the course of the disputation, the Khazar leaders (*načelnyi moužie*) qualify themselves, appropriately, as "bookless crowd" (*neknižnaa čed'*). Nevertheless, they appeal to the (holy) "books" as the supreme authority.[26] This contradictory presentation could be explained away as a misstatement by the author of the *Life* if the *Genizah Letter* did not feature the same apparent contradiction. When a crucial point in the disputation cannot otherwise be resolved, it is the pagan leaders of Khazaria (*sarê qazaria*) who give the order to produce "the books of the Torah of Moses" from the cave in the valley of Tizul. Like in the *Life*, the Khazar rulers are well aware of the authority of the books and, moreover, know exactly where to find them. Given the political implications of the kaghan's religious choice, this is not surprising. The Jewish sages had obviously arrived way ahead of the Christian and the Moslem missionaries and prepared the ground for the disputation. Although neither text puts it that way, Constantine was actually invited to play a game which had been rigged in advance.

The competition of faiths is also described in the *Reply* of King Joseph to Hasdai ibn Shaprut, at the beginning of Jehudah Halevi's famous treatise *The Kuzari* and, from the Arab standpoint, by al-Bakri.[27] All sources agree that only one disputation took place. Thus the *Genizah Letter* and the *Life of Constantine* tell the story of one and the same event. If so, we can know its date. To prepare for his mission in Khazaria, Constantine spent a winter studying Hebrew in Cherson. He also profited from this stay in order to recover and to transfer inside the city the relics of Pope Clement whose traditional burial place was neglected by the Chersonites for fear of venturing outside the city walls. Constantine's personal account of this memorable event, preserved in a Slavonic translation, bears the date of January 30,

25. Ed. Angelov-Kodov, p. 96.
26. Ed. Angelov-Kodov, p. 101, cf. p. 97.
27. See the survey by DUNLOP (cited n. 5), p. 90-91, 116ff.

861.[28] The disputation at the kaghan's court must have then taken place in the summer of the same year.[29]

This conclusion seems to be obvious but it is not. The Khazars' conversion was dated ca 860 by Joseph Marquart, followed by George Vernadsky.[30] Marquart quoted, in addition to the *Life of Constantine*, the commentary on Matthew by Christian of Stavelot who contrasts two recent conversions among the nations of Gog and Magog: while "one mighty nation" is circumcised and observes the entire Judaism, another, the Bulgars, is now being baptized.[31] The reference to the baptism of Bulgaria as taking place at the time of writing dates Christian's treatise in the late 860s and makes it the earliest testimony on the Khazars' conversion.[32] One could add that the first

28. *Slovo na prenesenie moštem preslavnago Klimenta neboli Legenda Chersonská*, ed. J. Vašica, *Acta Academiae Velehradensis* 19, 1948, p. 38-80, see p. 73; reprinted as *Die Korsuner Legende von der Überführung der Reliquien des hl. Clemens* (Slavische Propyläen 8), Munich 1965.

29. The standard works on Constantine's missions by Fr. Dvornik, *Les légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vues de Byzance*, Prague 1933, p. 148-211; idem, *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs*, New Brunswick 1970, p. 49-53, 65-69, present the mission to the Khazars as a political intiative of the Byzantine government prompted by the attack of the Rus on Constantinople on June 18, 860. Constantine's alleged task consisted in reviving the old alliance between Khazaria and Byzantium and in directing it against the Rus. Dvornik must then dismiss as editorial "invention" the data of the *Life* on the sending of a Khazar embassy and on its stated aim (the author firmly believes, in any case, that the Khazars' conversion to Judaism dates well before the embassy). This discord with the main source invalidates Dvornik's analysis. The *Life* leaves no doubt that Constantine's mission was instigated by the Khazars and responded to an internal agenda of the Khazar court. Whatever political benefits the Byzantines could expect from it were clearly secondary.

30. Marquart (cited n. 24), p. 5-27, dates Constantine's mission between 851 and 863; cf. G. Vernadsky, Byzantium and Southern Russia, *Byz.* 15, 1940-1941, p. 67-86, see p. 76-86. Marquart did not know of the existence of the *Genizah Letter* published nine years after his book, while Vernadsky made no use of it because, influenced by Grégoire (cited n. 3), he doubted its authenticity.

31. *PL* 106, col. 1456: *Nam et in Gog et in Magog, quae sunt gentes Hunnorum, quae ab eis Gazari vocantur, iam una gens quae fortior erat ex his quas Alexander conduxerat, circumcisa est, et omnem Judaismum observat. Bulgarii quoque, qui et ipsi ex ipsis gentibus sunt, quotidie baptizantur.* Christian's idiosyncratic use of ethnic names buffled the commentators who did not notice that it is explained earlier in the treatise. The biblical Gog and Magog are identified as nations which were once called Huns and which now use the self-designation of Khazars (*gentium Gog et Magog, quae Gazara nunc vocatur, gentes quondam Hunnorum*, col. 1405). Since Christian perceives the ethnikon Khazars as generic, he cannot name the specific nation which converted to Judaism; its identity is clear to us though. B. Blumenkranz, *Les auteurs chrétiens latins du Moyen Age sur les juifs et le judaïsme*, Paris-The Hague 1963, p. 211, suggests introducing in the text some minor corrections (which he does not specify), so as to make it a response to Jewish polemists who supposedly took pride in the Khazars' conversion.

32. The proponents of an early conversion strive to advance its date. Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 121, n. 10, briefly suggests that Christian's treatise "may have been written considerably before the year 864". D. Ludwig, *Struktur und Gesellschaft des Chazaren-Reiches im Licht der schriftlichen Quellen* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Münster), 1982,

Arab writer to mention that the Khazars became Jews is Ibn al-Fakih (ca 903) who specifies that they only did so lately.[33] Nevertheless, Marquart's chronology has been solidly rejected by the students of the Khazar history in favor of much earlier dates quoted in Hebrew and Arabic sources. True, no one could make sense of the indication in the Long version of King Joseph's *Reply* placing the convertion 340 years beforehand. Since Joseph wrote ca 955, this would make a Muslim qadi participate in a competition of faiths ca 615, years before the Hegira.[34] Yet Jehudah Halevi's date, about 400 years before his time,[35] that is ca 740, has been accorded more credence, and al-Mas'udi's indication that "the king of the Khazars had already become a Jew in the Caliphate of Harun ar-Rashid" (786-809)[36] has generally been taken for reliable.

Neither of these dates carries much weight in itself. Jehudah Halevi, writing ca 1140, uses the Khazars' conversion as a setting for his theological treatise yet shows little knowledge of the Khazar history. As for al-Mas'udi (ca 943), his dating appears in a somewhat confused résumé of a more detailed account in a work which is no longer preserved. Detached from its historical context, this date is difficult to build upon (although we will see at the end of this chapter which tradition it may reflect). The two dates diverge widely. If, nevertheless, they are preferred to the much earlier testimony of the *Life of*

p. 328-332, dedicates most of the chapter on the Khazars' Judaism to an attempt to set Christian's treatise in the 830s yet provides no argument which would undermine the current consensus as to its date, cf. F. Rädle, "Christian von Stablo", *Lexikon des Mittelalters* II (1983), 1912-1913. The baptism of the Bulgars, which only became an issue in the West following King Boris' contacts with Pope Nicolas I in the late 860s, remains the main dating element. Ludwig's claim that Christian refers to sporadic cases of baptism which allegedly preceeded the officially decided conversion is weak, since the author clearly sets the christianisation of the Bulgars at the same level as the very official "circumcision" of the Khazars.

33. Ibn al-Faqîh al-Hamadânî, *Abrégé du Livre des pays*, tr. H. Massé, Damascus 1973, p. 353, cf. Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 109, n. 83. One hardly needs to accept Dunlop's claim that Ibn al-Fakih copied this remark verbatim from an earlier writer who, in his turn, had borrowed it from an even earlier one.

34. Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 151, tends to admit "that the figure is a late addition of some copist" but is also tempted to correct 340 years into 240. As V. Minorsky put it in his review of Dunlop's book (A New Book on the Khazars, *Oriens* 11, 1958, p. 122-145, see p. 133, reprinted in idem, *The Turks, Iran and the Caucasus in the Middle Ages*, London, Variorum, 1978), "such alteration rather obscures the incongruity of the text".

35. Juda Hallevi, *Le Kuzari. Apologie de la religion méprisée*, I, 1, tr. Ch. Touati (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses, 100), Louvain-Paris 1994, p. 1 (and see n. 2).

36. Mas'ûdî, *Les prairies d'or*, § 448, tr. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille revised by Ch. Pellat, I, Paris 1962, p. 161; cf. Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 89. Another Arabic account studied by S. Pines, A Moslem Text concerning the Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 13, 1962, p. 44-55, belongs to 'Abd al-Jabbâr Ibn Muhammad al-Hamdâni writing ca 1010. It excludes 740 in situating the conversion "recently in the days of the 'Abbâsids and during their rule (p. 47)" but otherwise is not very precise.

Constantine, this is because they appear to be corroborated by what is considered to be the most authoritative source on the conversion, King Joseph's *Reply*.

King Joseph's story of the conversion differs from the one in the *Letter*. Rather than have it inspired by a Jewish wife who convinced the commander-in-chief that he was actually a Jew, the *Reply* features an angel of God who appears to the Khazar king, Bulan,[37] and guides him in his pious undertaking. What is more, we read in the *Reply* that the Jewish religion was introduced in Khazaria in two stages. The actual conversion, which involved the competition of faiths, took place on the instigation of King Bulan. Later though, "there arose from the sons of his sons a king, 'Ovadiah by name, righteous and straight, and he renovated the kingdom and established the law (*din*) according to the religion and the halakah. He built synagogues and seminaries, and he gathered plenty of sages of Israel and gave them plenty of gold and silver, and they explained to him the twenty-four books (of the Bible), the Mishnah, the Talmud and the use of the prayerbooks by the cantors. And he feared God and loved the Torah and the commandments" etc. Eleven (in the Short version) or twelve (in the Long version) more names of kings of the dynasty follow.[38]

Much of the modern reconstruction of the Khazar history focuses on this double-dip conversion. Scholars speculate on the nature of Bulan's Judaism. As opposed to 'Ovadiah, whose rabbinic orthodoxy cannot be questioned, Bulan is sometimes described as a self-styled prophet[39] or, worse, a Karaite.[40] Soviet historians were prone to look for the social forces behind 'Ovadiah's reform. His very Jewish orthodoxy made him a natural champion of the interests of international Jewish capital.[41] Jehudah Halevi's date, ca 740, was applied to the conversion of Bulan while al-Mas'udi's vague "under Harun ar-Rashid" was reserved for 'Ovadiah.[42]

The long list of Khazar-Jewish kings which appears in the *Reply* adds to the argument for an early conversion. One cannot comfortably fit more than

37. See below, p. 251, on Bulan's name and title.

38. Ed. Kokovcov, p. 23-24 (Short version), cf. p. 30-31 (Long version).

39. A. N. Poliak, *Khazaria: A History of a Hebrew Kingdom in Europe*[3] (in Hebrew), Tel-Aviv 1951, p. 141-146.

40. This view was last defended by S. Szyszman, Le roi Bulan et le problème de la conversion des Khazars, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 33, 1957, p. 68-76, cf. idem, Les Khazars. Problèmes et controverses, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 152, 1957, p. 174-221. It has been refuted by Z. Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, New York-Jerusalem 1959, p. 64-79.

41. See, most recently, S. A. Pletneva, *Hazary*[2], Moscow 1986, p. 62-70.

42. This chronological distinction was notably developed by Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 116-170, and, with some variations, by Artamonov and many others. A recent study suggests a conversion in three stages: ca 730, between 799 and 809 and, of all dates, between 833 and 843: O. Pritsak, The Khazar kingdom's conversion to Judaism, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 2, 1978, p. 261-281; cf. idem, Turkological Remarks on Constantine's Khazarian Mission in the *Vita Constantini*, in E. G. Farrugia, R. F. Taft and G. K. Piovesana (eds.), *Christianity among the Slavs: The Heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius* (*OCA* 231), Rome 1988, p. 295-298.

fifteen kings in less than a century between 861 and the date of the *Reply* (ca 955). Marquart solved the problem by dismissing the *Reply* out of hand as a medieval fake,[43] yet such global scepticism is now out of fashion. No one contests any more that the two preserved versions, however much tampered with by later editors, go back to an authentic tenth-century document. Fortunately, in the part that concerns us here, we have the means to get an idea of its original tenor.

The story of the conversion, as told in very similar terms in the Long and in the Short version of the *Reply*, lacks coherence. Indeed, Bulan's action is presented as a complete shift of Khazaria to Judaism. Bulan "brought sages of Israel and they explained to him the Torah and arranged (for the observance of) all the commandments. Till this day we observe this venerable and true law (*din*), may God's name be blessed forever. From the day that our fathers entered under the wings of God's presence, he subjugated before us all our enemies and humbled every nation and tongue around us etc."[44] Thus the conversion instigated by Bulan and carried out by the sages of Israel was not only comprehensive but also efficient on the political and military level. It assured without a hitch the good fortunes of the country. The description of 'Ovadiah's reform comes straight afterwards as a total surprise. How can one claim a strict observance of the Jewish law since the days of Bulan if this law (*din*) was only properly established by 'Ovadiah? What could be meant by saying that Bulan's sages taught the Khazars Torah and all the commandments, which is the very definition of Judaism, if the most basic religious instruments and institutions were introduced for the first time by the second set of sages under 'Ovadiah? The description of Bulan's conversion, rather than prepare the reader for the second stage, makes any further religious reform superfluous. This makes one wonder whether both passages belong to one and the same author.

Recent students of the conversion feel uneasy about 'Ovadiah and his reform. Peter Golden warns that the "mention of of the 'king Obadiyah' (put in quotation marks by Golden, C. Z.)" in the *Reply* "must be used with considerable caution".[45] Possibly acting on this prudent counsel, Novosel'cev barely mentions 'Ovadiah.[46] Yet this intuitive mistrust would not take us far if it could not be substantiated by philological evidence. This evidence is contained in a halakic responsum, produced ca 1100 by rabbi Jehudah ben Barzillai of Barcelona, which quotes King Joseph extensively.[47] This earliest

43. MARQUART (cited n. 24), p. 8-11.

44. Ed. Kokovcov, p. 23 (Short version), cf. p. 30 (Long version).

45. P. B. GOLDEN, Khazaria and Judaism, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 3, 1983, p. 127-156, see p. 147-148.

46. NOVOSEL'CEV (cited n. 5), p. 149.

47. Edited by S. ASSAF, R. Jehudah al-Barceloni on the Epistle of Joseph, the king of Khazars (in Hebrew), *Yeshurun*, Berlin 1924, p. 113-117, repr. in idem, *Meqoroṯ wemeḥqarim beṯoldoṯ israel* (English title: *Texts and Studies in Jewish History*), Jerusalem 1946, p. 91-95; the text is reproduced in Kokovcov (cited n. 4), p. 127-128. In an additional note, Concerning R. Jehudah of Barcelona's Remarks on the Khazars (in Hebrew), *Meqoroṯ wemeḥqarim*, p. 96-99, Assaf refutes in strong terms Grégoire's (cited n. 3) allegation that rabbi Jehudah's responsum is a twentieth-century forgery and

reference to the *Reply* shows that rabbi Jehudah disposed of a text which differed substantially from the one we read in the versions preserved.[48]

The halakic context of the quotation can be resumed here shortly. Rabbi Jehudah upholds the orthodox view that no sacrifices are allowed after the destruction of the Jewish Temple yet must admit that, according to the *Reply*, sacrifices were practices by the Khazars. The rabbi first toys with the idea of denying the Khazars' very Jewishness — gentiles are allowed to sacrifice to One God — yet rejects this solution since the evidence for their conversion is overwhelming. In addition to King Joseph's *Reply*, it includes a letter written by a Jew from Constantinople "in his own language", obviously in Greek, which rabbi Jehudah could read in translation and which attested to the fact that "the Khazars converted to Judaism and had kings who were converts", as well as testimonies of Muslim writers. Jehudah ben Barzillai presents his excuses for dwelling on stories which sound like mere anecdotes, yet his logic is clear: he needs to establish for sure that the Khazars were Jews in order to show that the evidence on sacrifices that they allegedly performed presents a halakic problem and merits discussion. This is why the responsum ends with a long quotation from the *Reply* which describes the conversion of the Khazars.

This quotation makes it clear that both the Long and the Short version go back to a text which had undergone a substantial alteration, whereby any reference to sacrifices was expurgated while the Jewish orthodoxy of the Khazars and the ancentry of their conversion were enhanced. Rabbi Jehudah has no knowledge of King 'Ovadiah and his reform. The description of Bulan's conversion and of God's blessing which reposed on his descendants leads straight, with no interruption in the quotation, to the listing of Bulan's dynasty. This list of the Khazar-Jewish kings is much shorter than in the two later versions:

Jehudah ben Barzillai	Short version	Long version
Bulan	Bulan	Bulan
|	<a gap of several generations>	
|	'Ovadiah	'Ovadiah
Hezekiah	Hezekiah	Hezekiah
Menasheh	Menasheh	Menasheh
|	Hanukkah	Hanukkah
Isaac	Isaac	Isaac
|	Zebulun	Zebulun
Menasheh	Menasheh	Mosheh[49]
|	Nissi	Nissi

indicates the discovery of a sixteenth-century manuscript from which derives the eighteenth-century copy that he had used in editing the text.

48. For a systematic application of rabbi Jehudah's responsum to the textual criticism of the *Reply*, see C. ZUCKERMAN, The Three Versions of the Reply of the Khazar King Joseph to Hasdai ibn Shaprut (forthcoming).

49. A *nun* was misread for a *waw* (only one letter makes the difference in Hebrew between Menasheh and Mosheh).

|	|	Aaron
|	Menahem	Menahem
Benjamin	Benjamin	Benjamin
Aaron	Aaron	Aaron
Joseph	Joseph	Joseph

King Joseph's *Reply* as quoted by Jehudah ben Barzillai lists seven kings after Bulan. Their number grows to twelve in the Short version and to thirteen in the Long.[50] The latter most inflated list serves to sustain the indication, which appears only in the Long version, that King Joseph writes 340 years after Bulan's conversion. The fact that the names of the "missing" kings do not come in a row makes it highly unlikely that they were omitted by a negligent copist of the responsum. Rather, one distinguishes an editor's effort to pump up the list by evenly spread interpolations. The table makes clear the dynamics of the expansion of the Khazar dynasty, yet one point deserves a special emphasis. The absence of King 'Ovadiah from Jehudah ben Barzillai's quotation shows that the original *Reply* presented the Khazars' conversion in the same way as our anonymous *Letter*, as a one-time act by the founder of the dynasty. Both sources would eagerly include any data enhancing the image of the Khazars as orthodox Jews, but they show no knowledge of 'Ovadiah's reform.

I summarize the findings thus far. The official introduction of Judaism in the Khazar state can be dated ca 861, very soon after Constantine's mission. It took place in one stage, on the initiative of the commander-in-chief, alias king (see the next chapter), Bulan. Thus Jewish Khazaria existed for only a century, which explains the limited penetration of Judaism among the Khazars and the small number of references to it in the Jewish literature. Judaism was not introduced in Khazaria without preparation. There is nothing improbable in the claim that the Jews first influenced through intermarriage the religious customs of part of the Khazars, and I trust the story of the Jewish wife who convinced the chief officer that he was actually a Jew. This might be the explanation for al-Mas'udi's statement that "the king of the Khazars had already become a Jew in the Caliphate of Harun ar-Rashid" (786-809). According to the *Letter*, the commander-in-chief, although he only came out of the closet after a long time at the head of the state, was a Jew from birth. In this perspective, his entire term counts as Jewish, and the tradition which reached al-Mas'udi might be close to the truth, even though I would not press it as to conclude that the Jewish chief had attained power as early as 809.

50. The fact that the list of kings in Jehudah ben Barzillai's text is shorter than in both complete versions of the *Reply* is noted, without comment, by Poliak (cited n. 39), p. 177. Novosel'cev (cited n. 5) shows little coherence when he first qualifies the text of Jehudah ben Barzillai as "the most ancient version (*drevnejšij variant*)" of King Joseph's *Reply* (p. 5-6) and then dismisses it in his brief discussion of the dynastic list as "a later copy (*bolee pozdnij spisok*)" of the *Reply* (p. 149 and especially n. 646, p. 170).

c. The aftermath of the conversion. Khazar-Jewish kings

The *Letter* describes the aftermath of the competition of faiths as follows. Jews start arriving from Bagdad, Khorasan and Byzantium and strengthen the Jewish religion in Khazaria. "The men of the land" appoint one of the wise men as judge and call him in the Khazar language *kagan*: this is how the "judges who arose after him" are designated "until this day". The men of the land also give the chief officer a Jewish name, Sabriel — his original Khazar name is never mentioned in the *Letter* — and make him king (fol. 1v, 13-19). Since we were told that there had been no kings beforehand, the conversion to Judaism becomes the occasion for a major constitutional reform of the Khazar state.

King Joseph, in his *Reply* to Hasdai, does not dwell on the origin of the king's office. He only says that many generations after the Khazars had conquered their land, "there rose" a king named Bulan (or Bolan)[51] who sought the true God and who, guided by an angel in a dream, launched the competition of faiths and converted to Judaism. Scholars agree that Bulan is the original name of King Sabriel. Since Joseph is in no way tempted by the concept of return but speaks of an outright conversion, he does not hesitate to call his forefather by his Khazar name. Then Joseph introduces a detail which must have left his reader perplexed unless he disposed of additional sources on Khazaria. It turns out that Bulan, before he could embrace Judaism or convoke the sages of competing religions, had to solicite the angel to appear to the Big Chief (*hasar hagadol*) of the Khazars who, infidels as they were, would not tolerate his initiative without the latter's support. God made the angel appear to the Chief, the Chief informed the king of his vision, and only then Bulan could gather his ministers and slaves and start the entire

51. The Hebrew allows either vocalisation. The form Bulan, most commonly admitted, was explained as a Turkic word meaning elk or deer by V. Minorsky (in Poliak, cited n. 39, p. 141), cf. Szyszman, Le roi Bulan (cited n. 40) and P. B. Golden, *Khazar Studies*, Budapest 1980, I, p. 169-171. A somewhat similar name-form appears in two other sources. The Georgian Chronicle (*K'art'lis C'xovreba*, ed. S. Qauxč'išvili, I, Tbilisi 1955, p. 249-250) tells the story of Khazar general Bulč'an (or Bluč'an) who failed to prevent Georgian princess Šušan, destined to marry the kaghan, from committing suicide and was cruelly executed by the prospective spouse. The episode, if historical, belongs in the eighth century. *A History of Sharvān and Darband*, ed. V. Minorsky, Cambridge 1958, p. 17, tr. p. 42, names the Khazar king who attacked Bāb al-Abwāb in 901 K.SĀ b. B.LJĀN; the editor, p. 106, n. 1, suggests vocalizing the latter form Buluchan and identifying this "Khazar name or rank" with that of Bulč'an; cf. Golden, *ibid.*, p. 171-173. Pritsak 1978 (cited n. 42), p. 261, 272, goes a step farther and identifies all three forms. He claims that, rather than a proper name, they represent the tribal designation (eponym) of "West Turkic charismatic tribes", the Barč. By virtue of phenomenon called in Altaic linguistics lambdacism, Barč becomes Balč-ān, Bolč-ān, then Bolān, which is, according to Pritsak, the proper vocalisation of the Hebrew name. In Pritsak 1988 (cited n. 42), p. 296, a further transformation occurs: the West Turkic charismatic tribes become "the Iranian mercantile clan of the Bolčān", but, as we see, the same basic form of the name is maintained. Whatever one may think of the nature of the names, the persons involved should clearly be distinguished.

process of conversion. The Big Chief is obviously the kaghan.[52] His office is never expressly mentioned by Joseph and yet, in the description of the conversion, he slips in through the back door.

To understand King Joseph's embarassed half-silence, one needs to know that the explanation of the origin of the kaghan's office in the *Genizah Letter* is false. Kaghans were originally the effective rulers of the Khazar state. Yet their position undergoes a gradual decline which can be compared to the fate of the Merovingian dynasty. Always chosen from one ancient lineage, they become mere sacral garantors of the good fortunes of Khazaria and are increasingly confined to the palace. Kaghan's deputy, beg or peh (or *isha,* best explained as the old Turkic title shad), takes over the affaires of the state. Tenth-century Arab sources call the beg king and attribute to him the authority of selecting the kaghan among the members of the qualified lineage as well as of executing him when he outlives his usefulness.[53] Thus the author of the *Letter*, while acknowledging the existence of a kaghan, conceals the fact that the ancestors of Joseph, his king, were upstarts who had pushed aside the ancient Khazar dynasty. Nevertheless, his definition of the kaghan's position contains a grain of truth. The only residual power which Ibn Fadlan (922) recognizes to a kaghan is that of supreme judge who can order the execution of army commanders, including the beg, who flee from the field of battle.[54]

The conversion to Judaism involved the kaghan yet, being initiated by the beg, enhanced the latter's position and contributed to making it hereditary. While the intricacies of the political play at the Khazar court escape us, the dynamics of the constitutional change gain in coherence when set in the chronological framework established in the previous chapter. Scholars who date the conversion in the early eighth century or ca 800 extend the decline of the kaghan's power over 150-200 years. Recently, Novosel'cev claimed that it had been triggered by the crushing defeat inflicted on the Khazars by the

52. See Kokovcov (cited n. 4), p. 76; Novosel'cev (cited n. 5), p. 136-137.

53. On the emergence of the Khazar "diarchy", see the pertinent analysis by Novosel'cev (cited n. 5), p. 134-143; cf. Ludwig (cited n. 32), p. 112-201. While it is almost a matter of consensus now that kaghan's power declined over time, I am perplexed by Peter Golden's position. Golden admits the change in the kaghan's function as he "became, in time, an increasingly sacred, holy figure" (art. cited n. 5, p. 264), yet claims that the "royauté double", chracterized by a "kaghanat décoratif" and by devolution of all real power to a deputy, constituted an intrinsic feature of the Khazar and of the Turkic political system in general, see P. Golden, Khazar, *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*², IV (1978), 1205-1214, p. 1210 and idem, Gosudarstvo i gosudarstvennost' u hazar: vlast' hazarskih kaganov, in *Fenomen vostočnogo despotizma: Struktura upravlenija i vlasti*, Moscow 1993, p. 211-233, see p. 223-227. Golden does not explain how, in his view, the kaghan's position evolved and offers no timetable for this process (see esp. Gosudarstvo, p. 226).

54. Ibn Fadlan, § 119, tr. A. P. Kovalevskij, *Kniga Ahmeda Ibn-Fadlana o ego putešestvii na Volgu v 921-922 gg.*, Harkiv 1956, p. 146-147; tr. M. Canard, Ibn Faḍlān, *Voyage chez les Bulgars de la Volga*, Paris 1988, p. 84-85; cf. Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 113.

Arabs in the 740s.[55] And yet, the earlist attestation of a power-sharing between a kaghan and a peh dates from the 830s.[56] In 861, it is the kaghan who receives the Byzantine envoy and judges in the competion of faiths, in short, who acts in the *Life of Constantine* as the highest authority of the Khazar state. He is seconded by the "first counsellor", no doubt the beg.[57] This description goes hand in hand with King Joseph's reluctant admission that his ancestor, Bulan, could take no action without the approval of the "Big Chief" of the Khazars. The kaghan's public appearances and the authority he exercises in the 860s contrast sharply with the tenth-century testimonies. Ibn Rustah, writing in the 920s, preserved what might be the earliest description of the powerless kaghan who "does not enjoy the obedience of the Khazars but has the name only" and of the *isha* as king who "in regard to control and the armies is so placed that he does not have to care for anyone above him".[58] A more detailed account by Ibn Fadlan (922) mentions the kaghan's very rare appearances in public and his residual judicial authority,[59] while al-Mas'udi (ca 943) describes him as being totally secluded "in the power of another king and in his house" and executed by the latter "when Khazaria suffers from dearth or any other calamity befalls the country".[60] This rapid deterioration of the kaghan's position in the second half of the tenth century concludes a process which started not two centuries but only two or three generations before. The link between the conversion and the new mode of government, as established in the *Genizah Letter*, appears to be wholly justified.

55. Novosel'cev (cited n. 5), p. 140; see, however, Ludwig's (cited n. 32), p. 166-168, argument for a later date.

56. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio* 42, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, tr. R. J. H. Jenkins (*CFHB* 1), Washington 1967, p. 182-183.

57. Ed. Angelov-Kodov, p. 97.

58. Ibn Rusteh, *Les atours précieux*, tr. G. Wiet, Cairo 1955, p. 156; cf. Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 104. A parallel description in Gardîzî (ca 1050), tr. A. F. Martinez, Gardîzî's Two Chapters on the Turks, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 2, 1982, 109-217, p. 152-153. Identifying and dating the two texts' common source is problematic. The description of the Khazars belongs to a series of chapters on peoples of the East European steppe which includes data on the advanced islamisation of the Volga Bulgars (tr. Wiet, p. 158) which are hardly conceivable before 922 (see Marquart, cited n. 24, p. 24-26); the conversion of the Alan prince to Christianity (tr. Wiet, p. 167) takes place ca 915 (see below, n. 65). On the other hand, Great Moravia is said to be ruled by King Svyetopolk (869-895) and, what is more, the two texts ignore the migration of the Pechenegs and the Hungarians which redrew the ethnic map of the region in the early 890s. One should probably admit that the source of Ibn Rustah and Gardîzî was composed in the last quarter of the ninth century and perfunctorily revised very soon after Ibn Fadlan's mission to the Volga Bulgars in 922; one cannot know whether the chapter on the Khazars was also retouched. Ibn Rustah's treatise in often dated ca 903, the year of the author's pilgrimage to Mecca mentioned in the text, yet this is only the terminus post quem.

59. See above, n. 54.

60. Mas'ûdî, *Les prairies d'or*, § 453, tr. Barbier de Meynard et al., p. 163; cf. Dunlop (cited n. 5), p. 207-208.

The *Letter*, in any case, speaks no more of the kaghan and is only interested in kings. We learn that King Sabriel made peace and concluded a treaty with the king of the Alans, Khazaria's strongest neighbour (fol. 1v, 21-2r, 2). Given that Bulan-Sabriel had a long career behind him when he established his family as hereditary rulers of Khazaria, he probably did not live long after 861. A period of peace followed, and the next king mentioned is Benjamin, in whose days the Byzantine emperor started stirring up nations against Khazaria. Byzantine intrigues did not cease under Kings Aaron and Joseph (fol. 2r, 3-17). The *Letter* skips over four kings who appear between Bulan and Benjamin in King Joseph's *Reply* (in Jehudah ben Barzillai's version): Hezekiah, Menasheh, Isaac and another Menasheh. This gap is explained by the special perspective of the *Letter*'s historical survey. Rather than provide a systematic overview of the Khazar history, it traces the stages of confrontation between Khazaria and Byzantium down to its culmination in the writer's time, in the early 940s.

The wars allegedly instigated by the Byzantines left traces in other sources thus providing chronological landmarks for King Benjamin and his successors. The list of Benjamin's enemies includes, in addition to at least one name which is lost and one that cannot be read with certainty, the As (steppe Alans or Burtas), the Pechenegs, the Turks (Uzes or Oghuz or Ghuzz) and the Byzantines (fol. 2r, 5-6).[61] An almost identical list appears in Gardîzî who says of the Khazars: "Every year they go to [make] war to the Pecheneg country, and sometimes it may be that [they go] to the Ghuzz and Burdâs (countries) as well".[62] The endemic fighting described by Gardîzî would be difficult to date regardless of the problematic dating of his source. We know, however, that a war between the Khazars and the Uzes took place shortly before the winter of 921/2, when Arab diplomat Ibn Fadlan visited the Uzes and ran the risk of being delivered to the Khazars in exchange for the Uz captives.[63] On the other hand, the *Letter* mentions the Uzes as allies and not as enemies of Benjamin's son Aaron in a war of ca 932 (see below). If the war of ca 920 was fought by King Benjamin, his reign would fall in the early tenth century.[64]

King Aaron's main enemy was his one-time ally, the king of the Alans. The *Letter* claims that "the king of Greece enticed him" to fight the Khazars, and scholars link the change of alliance by the Alans to their conversion to Chris-

61. For the identification of the peoples, see PRITSAK (cited n. 6), p. 132-134. A fifth name is read by Golb as "BM and applied by Pritsak to Black Bulgars who supposedly dwelled on the Kuban" river. The reading, however, is very uncertain and the interpretation even more so.

62. Tr. Martinez, p. 154. The parallel text in IBN RUSTAH (tr. Wiet, p. 157; cf. above, n. 58) only mentions the annual raids against the Pechenegs.

63. Tr. Kovalevskij, p. 129; tr. Canard, p. 47.

64. PRITSAK (cited n. 6), p. 132-137, dates Benjamin's reign ca 880-900 by identifying the wars of the *Genizah Letter* as the major campaign of the early 890s, in the course of which the Khazars, allied with the Uzes, drove away the Pechenegs from their old dwelling between the rivers Volga and Ural, see CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio* 37, ed. Moravcsik-tr. Jenkins, p. 166-167. One should not forget, however, that Benjamin in the *Letter* fights not only the Pechenegs but also the Uzes.

tianity which took place during the second patriarchate of Nicholas I Mysticus (912-925).[65] The actual war did not start before 922 – otherwise it would have been mentioned by Ibn Fadlan, whose mission involved forging a Muslim anti-Khazar alliance between the Caliphate and the Volga Bulgars — but its end is securely dated. Al-Mas'udi, who writes ca 943, notes that "after 320 A.H. (A.D. 931/2), they (the Alans) abjured their new faith and expelled the bishops and the priests whom the Byzantine emperor had previously sent to them".[66] This must be the result of the crushing defeat which was, according to the *Letter*, inflicted upon the Alans by King Aaron who hired against them the Uzes. Thus we learn that King Aaron was active in the early 930s.

Prudent King Aaron captured the Alan king alive, "honored him greatly and took his daughter as a wife for his son Joseph". This policy paid off and the Alan king remained a reliable ally of Joseph who was a contemporary of "Romanus the Wicked", the Byzantine Emperor Romanus I Lecapenus. Upon learning of the forced conversion of the Jews decided by Romanus, Joseph "brought many Christians to ruin".[67] Romanus started persecuting the Jews towards 932, obviously in retaliation for the defeat of the Christian mission in Alania[68] — just as in the 860s, Basil I reacted to the success of the Jewish religion in Khazaria by an attempt to convert the Byzantine Jews by decree[69] — and was dethroned in December 944. Joseph succeded his father between these two dates, no doubt in the late 930s, since, as we shall see, he was embroiled in a conflict with Romanus by 940. The persecution in By-

65. The conversion of Alans was dated initially in Nicholas' first patriarchate (901-907); this dating can still be found in PRITSAK (cited n. 6), p. 135, and in V. A. KUZNECOV, *Očerki istorii alan*, Ordžonikidze 1984, p. 204. Now Nicholas' letters which concern the Alans have been assigned a later date and it has been shown that Peter, the first archbishop of Alania, did not leave Constantinople before 914, see NICHOLAS I Patriarch of Constantinople. *Letters*, ed. R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, Washington 1973 (*CFHB* VI), p. XXIX.

66. MAS'ÛDÎ, Les prairies d'or, § 479, tr. Barbier de Meynard et al., p. 173. PRITSAK's (cited n. 6), p. 136, arbitrary correction of the date to 310 A.H. (A.D. 922) should be dismissed.

67. Golb translates the verb *sillah* "did away" and explains that it is here "evidently used as a euphemism for *hishmid* destroyed or *harag* slew". He quotes the *Book of Yosippon* which uses the verb in this sense yet admits that there is no evidence that our author ever read the book. The verb's basic meaning of abuse, oppress, smash could point to a less violent way of ruining a person, like confiscation of property or expulsion. After all, the author of the *Letter* had no reason to use euphemisms.

68. See A. SHARF, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade*, London 1971, p. 94-99, who cites the letter adressed by the Doge of Venice Peter II to the German Emperor Henry I and read at the church council at Erfurt in the summer 932, which hails Emperor Romanus' recent order to "all the Jews to be baptized", ed. E. Dümmler, in *Gesta Berangarii imperatoris*, Halle 1871, p. 158. Since 931/2 is also al-Mas'udi's date for the expulsion of the Christian priests from Alania, Romanus' persecution must have, indeed, been very recent.

69. On this episode, see G. DAGRON, Le traité de Grégoire de Nicée sur le baptême des Juifs, *TM* 11, 1991, p. 313-357. DAGRON, p. 347, suggests a link between Basil's policy and the expansion of Judaism in Khazaria.

zantium had started back in Aaron's time, but the young king was more eager to pick fights than his prudent father.

After Joseph's reprisals against Christians in Khazaria, Romanus sent great presents to "Helgo, king of Rusia", and incited him to attack Samkarc (ancient Phanagoria, Tmutorokan' of the Russian chronicles), a Khazar city on the east shore of Kerch strait. The emperor's choice of proxy to work his revenge owed nothing to chance. Some thirty years earlier, ca 910, the Rus had launched, with the Khazars' accord, their biggest raid ever against Muslim cities of the Caspian coast but, on the way back, were treacherously massacred by the Muslim guard of the Khazar king.[70] Many thousands of the Rus had perished and their relations with the Khazars never healed. Therefore, Romanus' intrigue could not fail. It provoked a series of military actions which are described in the *Letter* in utmost detail (fol. 2r, 17-2v, 14), over more space than any other episode in the Khazar history including the competition of faiths. For a Khazar Jew who writes barely five years after the events, their outcome represents a source of intense pride: the Byzantines are thoroughly humiliated and "the Rus subjugated to the power of Khazaria" (fol. 2v, 14). The first clashes, of no great consequence, are only attested to in the *Letter*. By contrast, the second wave of hostilities left also traces in Greek, Latin, Russian and oriental sources.

Helgo profited from the absence of the Khazar commander of Samkarc, whose title was *rab hashmonai*, and captured the city at night, "by stealth". The attack became know to Khazar official named Pesah who bore the title of BWLSSY (*baliqci*). According to the Byzantine historian Theophanes (describing events of ca 700), the *baliqci* resided in the city of Bosporus (modern Kerch), on the west shore of the strait of Kerch.[71] Helgo's people must have come on boats, as it was the custom of the Rus, and Pesah could not chase after them on sea, since the Khazars did not dispose of a fleet. He turned against a closer target which were the Byzantine possessions in Crimea. After having captured three towns and many villages, he put siege to the city of Cherson.

The description of the siege begins by an event, not explained by the editor, in the course of which the besieged "went out of the earth like worms" and "ninety of their men died". The defenders of Cherson no doubt attempted a sally by an underground dig or passage hoping to take the Khazars unawares. This rather common strategem failed and the two camps came

70. Mas'ûdî, *Les prairies d'or*, §§ 458-461, tr. Barbier de Meynard et al., p. 165-167, cf. tr. Minorsky (cited n. 51), p. 150-153. The exact date of this incident is still a matter of scholarly debate, see Novosel'cev (cited n. 5), p. 212-213.

71. Golb (cited n. 6), p. 116-117, cf. p. 104, argues for identifying the *rab hashmonai* of Samkarc and the BWLSSY Pesah. Pritsak (cited n. 6), p. 137-138, distinguishes between the two — he affirms, however, that both Bosporus and Samkarc were governed by the *baliqci* which is unwarranted by the sources — and this distinction needs to be emphasized. Golden (cited n. 51), p. 165-169, avoids identifying the terms βαλγίτζι(ν) in Theophanes, ed. de Boor, p. 373, and the *Letter*'s BWLSSY; his rather speculative discussion of each term's separate meaning ignores the important study by V. Minorsky, Balgitzi — "Lord of the Fishes", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 56, 1960, p. 130-137.

to terms. Pesah did not "destroy" the people of Cherson "but he set them to service in bondage". The biblical idiom probably refers to a war contribution.

The continuation of the text is mutilated and, as restituted by the editor, not entirely clear. The editor translates, without comment: "Thus did [Pesah] save [Qazar from] the hand of RWSW. He smote all who were found of them [. . . by the s]word." One wonders how, by imposing a contribution on Cherson, Pesah saved Khazaria and who were the people put to the sword, given that the Chersonites were spared. By modifying and completing the restitution, we obtain the following text: "And he saved [the Khazar captives from] the hand of the Rus and smote all who were found of them [in the city by the s]word."[72] Pesah saved not all Khazars but a specific group of them, the captives from Samkarc who were left by the Rus in Cherson to be sold in slavery. He executed all the Rus who could be found in the city, notably those, no doubt, who were left behind in order to sell the prisoners. This treacherous deal whereby the Chersonites agreed to extradite the Rus to the Khazars might be the explanation for the unusually cruel treatment inflicted on their city by King of the Rus Vladimir thirty odd years later.

After having taken his revenge from Romanus, Pesah "went to do battle against Helgo; he fought [four] months; the Lord subjugated him before Pesah". Pesah obtained the restitution of the booty which Helgo had taken from Samkarc and then put Helgo before an ultimatum: "Go and make war against Romanus, as you did fight against me, and I will leave you alone; but if not, then here I will either die or live until I shall work my revenge". Whatever his means of pressure, Pesah could force Helgo to attack Byzantium. The Rus fought against Constantinople four months at sea. Their men of valor fell there exterminated by the Greek fire. Helgo "fled, and being ashamed to return to his country, he went to Persia by sea, and there he and all his troops fell. Then were the Rus subjugated to the power of Khazaria."

The tenth-century *Continuation* of the chronicle of George the Monk (Amartolos), also known as the chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon, describes in detail the only attack of the Rus on Constantinople in the reign of Romanus I Lecapenus. It lasted four months, from June to September 941, and was crushed in two sea battles thanks to the use of the Greek fire.[73] Liutprand of Cremona, who visited the Byzantine capital a few years after the attack, and the nearly contemporary *Life of Saint Basil the Younger* provide a shorter but independent testimony on this event.[74] On the other hand, several oriental sources, in the first place the Arab Miskawayh, attest to an invasion by the

72. Read fol. 2v, 3-5: "wayasel [et shḇi qazar mi]yad rwsw wayaḳ et kol hanimsa'im mihem [ba'ir lepi ha]reḇ. The repetition of the subject (Pesah), as proposed in the editor's restitution of l. 4, is unwarranted.

73. Ed. I. Bekker, Bonn 1838, p. 914-916.

74. LIUTPRAND, *Antapodosis* V, 15, ed. J. Becker, *Die Werke Liudprands von Cremona*[3], Hannover-Leipzig 1915, p. 137-139. The relevant passage from the *Life of St. Basil the Younger* was edited by A. N. VESELOVSKIJ, Hoždenie Feodory po mytarstvam i neskol'ko epizodov iz žitija Vasilija Novogo, in *Sbornik otdelenija russkogo jazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk* 53, 1892, 6, see p. 65-68. On the date of the *Life*, probably the 960s, see L. RYDÉN, The *Life* of St. Basil the Younger and the Date of the *Life* of St. Andreas Salos, in *OKEANOS. Essays presented to IHOR ŠEVČENKO*

Rus of the west coast of the Caspian Sea, commonly called Persia at the time, in 944/5. Its initial success culminated in the capture of the rich city of Bardha'a yet did not last long. A great number of the Rus died of diarrhea caused by overindulging in fresh fruits to which they were not accustomed, some were killed by the Muslims and their chief perished in battle. The survivors were forced to retreat.[75]

The perfect correspondence of this sequence of events to the one described in the *Letter* was noticed soon after the *Letter* had been published yet caused more embarassment than satisfaction. According to the Russian chronicles, the attack on Constantinople in 941 was led by King Igor, while Helgi-Oleg had been dead by that time for many years. Igor's participation in the attack of 941 is independently confirmed by the late-tenth-century Byzantine historian Leo the Deacon who makes Emperor John Tzimiskes (969-976) remind Igor's son, Svjatoslav, how his father fled with barely ten ship out of ten thousand, himself a messenger of the disaster which struck the rest.[76] Liutprand of Cremona also mentions King Inger-Igor. What could be then the role of Oleg?

The early attempts to resolve this contradiction did not lack imagination. In fact, they showed an excess of it. By a complicated dynastic reasoning, Helgi became another name for Igor.[77] Otherwise, Helgi-Oleg was presented as an army commander under Igor[78] or as an independent Russian prince of Tmutorokan'.[79] Then Kokovcov, who had admitted the *Letter*'s historical value in his first Russian edition of the text (1913), turned much more sceptical in the second edition (1932),[80] thus reducing substantially the scholars' eagerness to accomodate for the new data.

The recent reedition of the *Letter* by Golb and Pritsak gave rise to new theories which are no more satisfactory. Pritsak claims that Constantinople which Helgo attacked "should not be understood to mean the capital of Byzantium per se, but rather the Byzantine possessions in the Black Sea basin". Thus Helgo's war against Byzantium becomes an otherwise unrecorded skirmish rather than the major confrontation of 941, while his Persian campaign is identified as the raid described by al-Mas'udi. Both operations are set in the 920s. Pritsak's interpretation of "Constantinople", however, is forced and, what is more, his reconstruction of the events entirely depends on

on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students (Harvard Ukrainian Studies 7), Harvard 1983, p. 568-586.

75. Miskawaihi, *The Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate*, tr. D. S. Margoliouth, V, Oxford 1921, p. 67-74. The text is discussed in more detail below.

76. Leo Diaconus, ed. C. B. Hase, Bonn 1828, p. 106, cf. p. 144.

77. Ju. D. Brutskus, *Pis'mo hazarskogo evreja ot X veka*, Berlin 1924, p. 30-31.

78. First proposed by M. D. Priselkov in A. Jakubovskij, Ibn-Miskavejh o pohode Rusov v Berdaa v 332 g. = 943/4 g., *VV* 24, 1923-1926, p. 63-92, see p. 89, n. 1. For a variation on this theme, cf. below, n. 97.

79. V. Mosin, Les Khazars et les Byzantins d'après l'Anonyme de Cambridge, *Byz.* 6, 1931, p. 309-325. No scholar would defend nowdays the existence of a Russian principality of Tmutorokan' in the first half of the tenth century.

80. See the references above, n. 4.

a correction of al-Mas'udi's date for the expulsion of the Christian priests from Alania which cannot be accepted.[81]

Novosel'cev follows Kokovcov in assailing the historical veracity of the *Letter*. He admits that the author had in mind the attack on Constantinople in 941 and the subsequent raid on Bardha'a yet asserts that, writing from memory or hearsay several decades after the events, he mixed up names and places. I have shown above that Novosel'cev's criticism is based on inadequate understanding of the *Letter*'s Hebrew and does not take into account the manuscript "convoy" of the text. There is actually every reason to believe that the *Letter* was produced no more than five years after the events described and was delivered to the messengers of Hasdai ibn Shaprut in Constantinople, where every detail in it could be easily verified.[82] This does not mean that the *Genizah Letter* can contain no blunder. However, this does suggest that the chances of an error are greater in any other, later source we have. The ancient Russian accounts of the first kings, which only took their present shape a century and a half after the attack of 941 at the earliest, fare poorly in comparison.

Fortunately, though, we are not obliged to reject one source in favor of the other. As I will attempt to show, their opposition is largely artificial. This demonstration will require a few preliminary remarks on the nature of the ancient Russian sources.

d. Igor's short reign. The death of Oleg

The times of the kings of the Rus Oleg and Igor lacked written records. Oral traditions concerning the two reached us in much later compilations. Several fourteenth and fifteenth century chronicles contain a nearly identical account of events up to the early twelfth century. This originally independent text, *Povest' vremennyh let*, is commonly named in English the *Primary Chronicle*.[83] A distinct though closely related account of the early Russian history can be found in the "younger" version of the *Novgorod First Chronicle* which dates from the fifteenth century.[84] The two texts have been scrutinized by generations of scholars whose conclusions do not agree in all points. While I am not unaware of the more or less recent controversies,[85] my analysis shall be based on what is, no doubt, the mainstream approach to these texts. First deliniated in the ground-breaking works of Aleksej A. Šahmatov at the turn of the century, it is developed in many recent studies.

81. See Pritsak (cited n. 6), p. 138-142; cf. above, n. 65-66.

82. See above, p. 240-241.

83. *Povest' vremennyh let*, ed. D. S. Lihačev, 2 vol., Moscow-Leningrad 1950. English translation by S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbovitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Text*, Cambridge Mass. 1953; cf. O. V. Tvorogov, "Povest' vremennyh let", in D. S. Lihačev (ed.), *Slovar' knižnikov i knižnosti Drevnej Rusi*, vol. I, Leningrad 1987, p. 337-343.

84. *Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis' staršego i mladšego izvodov*, ed. A. N. Nasonov, Moscow-Leningrad 1950; cf. B. M. Kloss, Letopis' Novgorodskaja pervaja, in *Slovar'* (cited n. 83), p. 245-247.

85. Surveyed by Tvorogov, cited n. 83 and 86.

With the exception of two treaties with Byzantium added in the *Primary Chronicle*, the narrative of the two reigns in both chronicles goes back to one and the same written source. The nature of this lost source, dubbed by Šahmatov *Načal'nyj svod* (Initial compilation), has recently been studied anew by Oleg V. Tvorogov who has shown that it was very close to the text we read in the *Novgorod First Chronicle*.[86] For the sake of simplicity, therefore, I will mainly restrict my analysis to the latter text and not dwell systematically on the modifications introduced by the author(s) of the *Primary Chronicle*.

The *Načal'nyj svod*, whose composition Šahmatov set in the 1090s, was not the first attempt at writing Russian history. The *svod* must have possessed the structure of a chronicle and had its narration divided in dated yearly entries. One can distinguish, however, in the texts preserved an earlier layer of historical writing, probably from the early eleventh century, that lacked this feature and presented the events as a continuous narration. A major chunk of narrative history, dubbed by Mihail N. Tihomirov *Skazanie o russkih knjaz'jah X veka* (Tale of the Russian Kings of the Tenth Century), tells the story of Igor and of his close successors. Its original short exposition of Igor's reign is, in our chronicles, "torn into separate years" through a "primitive interpolation" of empty yearly entries yet can be easily recovered.[87]

Oleg's position is described differently in the *Novgorod First* and in the *Primary Chronicle*. In the former text, he appears not as king but as Igor's commander-in-chief. The latter presents Oleg as king-regent who was appointed by Igor's father, Rjurik, to take care of his young son and who then reigned until his death despite Igor's coming out of age. The version of the *Novgorod First Chronicle* has been shown to be the original one to the extent that it reproduces faithfully the text that had been rewritten by the author of the *Primary Chronicle*.[88] Nevertheless, it is certain that Oleg was king in his own right: the treaty that he concluded with Byzantium in 911 attests to his position as independent ruler.[89] The discrepancy between the two sources is easy to explain. The eleventh-century historiography denied Oleg the rank of king because he had no claim to the succession of Rjurik, the half-legendary ancestor of the Russian princely lineage. The early-twelfth-century author of the *Primary Chronicle*, however, once he had obtained the text of the treaty of 911 and integrated it in his compilation, was obliged to

86. O. V. Tvorogov, Povest' vremennyh let i Načal'nyj svod (Tekstologičeskij kommentarij), *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoj literatury* 30, 1976, p. 3-26.

87. M. N. Tihomirov, Načalo russkoj istoriografii, *Voprosy Istorii* 1960, fasc. 5, p. 41-56, see p. 50-56. Ja. S. Lur'e, Problemy izučenija russkogo letopisanija, in D. S. Lihačev and N. F. Droblenkova (eds.), *Puti izucenija drevnerusskoj literatury i pis'mennosti*, Leningrad 1970, p. 43-48, see p. 47, sets the beginning of a systematic yearly notation of the events in the 1060s.

88. See Tvorogov (cited n. 86), p. 15-16.

89. The treaty also accords Oleg the title of *velikij knjaz'*; on this title, less precise than one used to think, see W. Vodoff, La titulature des princes russes du X^{e} au début du XII^{e} siècle et les relations extérieures de la Russie kiévienne, *Revue des études slaves* 55, 1983, p. 139-150, p. 141-143.

adapt his main narrative to the data contained in the new document.[90] Thus the chronicles reveal the basic ambiguity of Oleg's position as upstart king and yet as "tutor" of the legitimate king, Igor. This ambiguity, which many scholars attempt to remove through speculations one more daring than the other, is, as we shall see, a crucial element in understanding the events of 941.[91]

The chronicles also differ as to the chronology of Oleg's and Igor's reigns. In the *Novgorod First*, the chronological framework is rudimentary. The beginning of Oleg's career — or, for what it matters, of Igor's nominal rule — is not dated, while his death is set in 922. Igor's solo reign lasts for twenty four years (922-945). The *Primary Chronicle* introduces a more elaborate chronology. Each king is equally alloted thirty three years of reign: Oleg from 879 to 912 and Igor from 912 to 945. This "epic" number of years was recognized as such by Šahmatov[92] yet is taken for its face value by most modern students of the Russian history.[93] I do not feel the need, though, to dwell here more on the artificial character of the chronicles' dates in the period before

90. The *Primary Chronicle* makes Oleg a relative of Rjurik, ed. Lihačev, p. 19; it even makes him proudly proclaim that he is of princely lineage: *az esm' rodu knjaža*, ibid., p. 20. However, a collation with the parallel text in the *Novgorod First Chronicle* (ed. Nasonov, p. 107) shows the secondary character of this attempt at legitimating Oleg's position.

91. The difficulty of finding a satisfactory definition for Oleg's relations with Igor inspired several attempts to separate them entirely. For example, V. A. Parhomenko, *U istokov russkoj gosudarstvennosti (VIII-XI vv.)*, Leningrad 1924, p. 70-76, builds upon the now obsolete theory of an independent "center" of the Rus on the Sea of Azov and presents Oleg as the ruler of this "Rus of south-east" and as a contemporary of Igor, the conqueror and ruler of Kiev. By contrast, B. A. Rybakov, *Kievskaja Rus' i russkie knjažestva XII-XIII vv.*, Moscow 1982, p. 310-315, makes Oleg a northerner, a cruel Vrangian (Norman) chief who perfidiously conquers Kiev, tortures innocent Slavs and then retreats to his powerbase in Ladoga. Igor, a Slav ruling in Kiev at a somewhat later period, has no link whatsoever with this unsavory character. Finally, Pritsak (cited n. 6), p. 60-71, adheres to the theory of a lost generation. Oleg and Igor belong to the same "charismatic clan", yet Oleg dies in the 920s (in Persia), while Igor, the true conqueror of Kiev, starts reigning in the 930s, the name of Oleg's immediate successor being lost. There are more theories which share the assumption that the close association between Oleg and Igor was invented by the chroniclers. I see no point, however, in replacing the tradition of the sources with outright speculations.

92. A. A. Šahmatov, *Očerk drevnejšego perioda istorii russkogo jazyka*, Petrograd 1915 (reprint The Hague-Paris 1967), p. xxxii-xxxiii. Šahmatov tentatively situated Igor's installation in Kiev ca 940. More recently, O. P. Toločko, Do pitanija pro sakral'ni cinniki stanovlennja knjazivs'koi vladi na Rusi u IX-X st., *Arheologia* 1, 1990, p. 51-63, see p. 56, admits that the "sacral" number thirty three might have little to do with the actual duration of each king's reign.

93. Fairly representative recent accounts of the two reigns can be found in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 14 (1979), p. 135-138: "Igor" by W. K. Hanak; vol. 26 (1982), p. 1-7: "Oleg" by Th. S. Noonan. On Oleg, see also A. P. Novosel'cev, Obrazovanie Drevnerusskogo gosudarstva i pervyj ego pravitel', *Voprosy Istorii* 1991, fasc. 2-3, p. 3-20.

the death of Igor (945).[94] The chronicler sets "the beginning of the Russian land" in A. M. 6360 (852), which he wrongly considers to be the first year of Byzantine Emperor Michael III (842-867), because it is under Michael III that he finds the Rus mentioned for the first time in a translated Greek chronicle. Thereupon he disposes of three names, Rjurik, Oleg and Igor, in order to fill almost a whole century, until the 940s, when the Greek source provides another dated reference and the *Skazanie o russkih knjaz'jah,* a continuous historical narrative. Hence the effort to extend Oleg's and Igor's reigns. This analysis is not new, but what has not, to my knowledge, been noticed is that the account of Igor's reign contains the necessary elements for establishing its true chronology.

In the *First Novgorod Chronicle*, Igor's solo reign starts in 6430/922, after an epic raid conducted by Oleg in the outskirts of Constantinople and his mysterious disappearance: the chronicler admits his ignorance as to where Oleg went and where exactly he died (I will come back to this point). Here is the story of the reign: "And Igor dwelled in Kiev and reigned, and waged war against the Derevlians and the Uličans. And he had a general named Svendel'd; and he conquered the Uličans and imposed a tribute on them and gave it to Svendel'd. And there was one town which would not surrender, named Peresečen; and he stayed three years near it and barely captured. [And the Uličans had dwelled on the Lower Dnepr, and later came and settled between the Bug and the Dnestr.[95]] And he gave the tribute of the Derevlians to Svendel'd, and he raised a black marten from each hearth. And the troop said to Igor: 'Lo, you gave to one man a lot.' What happened next we will tell in the following years."

The next seventeen yearly entries are empty, marked only with the introductory formula "in the year so-and-so" (6431 to 6447) which introduces nothing. Under 6448/940 we read: "That year the Uličans surrendered and became tributary to Igor, and Peresečen was captured. That same year he gave their tribute to Svendel'd." 6449 is empty. Under 6450: "That year he gave the Derevlians' tribute to the same Svendel'd." 6451-6452 are empty.

Igor's soldiers' complaint, interrupted in 6430/922, continues in 6453/945: "That year the troop said to Igor: 'Svendel'd's men dress up with weapons and cloths while we are naked. Come, our King, with us to raise tribute: you will profit and so will we.'" Igor sets out with his troop, raises by violence a second tribute from the Derevlians, then disperses the main troop and comes back "with a small troop", greedy for more wealth. He is captured by the Derevlians and executed.

The redactor's purpose in vivisecting a continuous narrative is obvious. He strives to extend over twenty years and more a story which is much shorter. Yet one only needs to eliminate the empty years and the fake entries under

94. A recent study by I. Sorlin, Les premières années byzantines du Récit des temps passés, *Revue des études slaves* 63, 1991, p. 9-18, see p. 9-17 (with references), adds substantially to our understanding of the method and the materials employed in the creation of the chronicles' early chronology.

95. I mark with square brackets what is obviously a gloss, integrated at some stage in the original text of the *Skazanie*.

6448 and 6450 which repeat, out of context, passages which had appeared in their place before, and one recovers the original text. The narrative which emerges is not only coherent but also contains a clear internal chronology.

Igor started his reign by launching campaigns against the Derevlians, a tribe which dwelt to the west of Kiev, and against the Uličans on the Lower Dniepr. The Uličans offered little resistence and were subjected to a tribute which Igor granted to Svendel'd. Then an unexpected delay was caused by the siege of Peresečen which lasted three years. Peresečen is traditionally viewed as a town in the land of the Uličans, as implied by the entry of 6448/940 which links the surrender of the Uličans and the capture of Peresečen. But if we ignore this fake entry and follow the logic of the general narration, Peresečen must be identified as a town of the Derevlians who could only be subjected to a tribute in the year of its surrender.[96] That year, the Derevlians were taxed twice. Igor's attempt to raise a third tribute provoked his ruin.

This narrative reveals the duration of Igor's reign. The siege of Peresečen started in Igor's first year and in three years it was over. Thus in the original account which the author of the *Novgorod First Chronicle* altered but slightly, Igor only reigned for three to four years. If we count them back from the time of Igor's death early in 945, it turns out that he started ruling in 941. This is the year when, according to the *Genizah Letter*, his predecessor, Oleg, left his country which he was never to see again. The story of Igor's reign in the *Skazanie o russkih knjaz'jah* was very short just as his reign was short.[97] The

96. On the Uličans on the Lower Dnepr, see recently V. V. Sedov, *Vostočnye slavjane v VI-XIII vv.*, Moscow 1982, p. 130-132. The site of Peresečen could not be localized with security, but later references in the chronicles leave no doubt that the town must be sought close to Kiev, to the south, see B. A. Rybakov, Uliči, *Kratkie soobščenija Instituta Istorii Material'noj Kul'tury* 35, 1950, p. 3-17, see p. 6-7. This would situate Peresečen in the land of the Derevlians. To accomodate for both data, Rybakov, p. 14, postulated a double migration of the Uličans, first from the Lower Dnepr to the north, towards Kiev, and then from the Kiev region to the south-west, in the area between the Bug and the Dnestr. This solution of last resort is no longer necessary.

97. There are other indications that Igor died young. The chronicles present his only son, Svjatoslav, as a child who could be put on a horse, as if to lead the troops to avenge his father's death, yet was unable to hold a spear; he was probably no older than twelve, cf. I. Sorlin, Le témoignage de Constantin VII Porphyrogénète sur l'état ethnique et politique de la Russie au début du X^{e} siècle, *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 6, 1965, p. 147-188, see p. 153, n. 4. Igor's widow, Olga, is also young. After having executed her husband, the Derevlians concocte a plan of marrying her to their own ruler, Mal; later she visits Constantinople and charms the emperor who wants to marry her in his turn. The same story is told in the *Novgorod First*, ed. Nasonov, p. 110-114, and in the *Primary Chronicle*, ed. Lihačev, p. 42-45; however, the author of the latter text sets the marriage of Olga and Igor in 903 (p. 23) and Olga's trip to Constantinople, in 955 (p. 44-45), which would imply that she gave birth to Svjatoslav while in her mid-forties and seduced the emperor in her advanced sixties. That the chronicles' account of Olga is strongly tainted with legend is beyond the point. What needs to be emphasized is the gap between her image as young and beautiful widow in the original *Skazanie* and the artificially imposed chronological framework. The problem has been dealt with by many scholars, and I will quote the solution proposed by

alleged contradiction between the *Letter* and the *Chronicle* is only due to the latter's added absolute chronology which is reversed by the internal data of the text.

The knowledge that Igor's independent rule did not start before 941 makes it possible to reconstruct the events of the early 940s in a coherent fashion while integrating the data of all our sources. Oleg's appearance in the *Letter* as king of the Rus is no longer a surprise. The diarchy of Oleg and Igor, with all the ambiguity that the chronicles lend to their relations, is the key to the events of 941. The two led together the fleet of the Rus.[98] And while we ignore the circumstances in which Oleg had associated himself with the young "son of Rjurik", we will have no difficulty to discover how, in the summer 941, this relation broke.

The Russian chronicles borrow their description of the raid of 941 in translated Greek sources: in the *Continuation of George the Monk* and in the *Life of St. Basil the Younger*. The former describes two sea battles, on the approaches to Constantinople in June and off the shore of Asia Minor in September. The latter source is mainly interested in the second event. The Russian chroniclers, however, transform the relevant passages in a peculiar way. They eliminate consistently the second engagement and make the survivors flee to Kiev straight after the first. Two recent studies analyse their accounts and argue convincingly that the chroniclers strived to accord their sources to a local Russian tradition which reduced the campaign of 941 to the first battle.[99] The testimony of Liutprand of Cremona provides the rational for this approach. Liutprand describes the first battle only and makes it clear that Igor fled immediately after this first defeat.[100] No wonder that the descendants of Igor preferred to forget that he had fled before the war was over, leaving behind the major part of his troops.[101]

G. VERNADSKY, *Kievan Russia*, New Haven 1948, p. 32-35. Vernadsky makes "Halgu" of the *Genizah Letter* an elder son of Igor and Olga, so as to accomodate for the *Letter*'s data — the poor lad is sent to die in Persia — and to avoid the embarrassment of Olga having her first son "in her late forties or even in her fifties (...), even if we suppose that she had been a mere girl at the time of her marriage".

98. This is also the conlusion of N. K. CHADWICK, *The Beginnings of Russian History: an Enquiry into Sources*, Cambridge 1966, p. 48-64, although her arguments mostly differ from mine.

99. N. JA. POLOVOJ, K voprosu o pervom pohode Igorja protiv Vizantii (Sravnitel'nyj analiz russkih i vizantijskih istočnikov), *VV* 18, 1961, p. 85-104; JA. N. ŠČAPOV, Russkaja letopis' o političeskih vzaimootnošenijah Drevnej Rusi i Vizantii, in *Feodal'naja Rossija vo vsemirno-istoričeskom processe (Festschrift L. V. Čerepnin)*, Moscow 1972, p. 201-208. Ščapov ignores Polovoj's study — although he cites his earlier articles — and repeats many of his conclusions. There is nothing to support Ščapov's suggestion that the Russian version of the raid goes back to a written account "which might have been produced in Igor's time", rather than to an oral tradition.

100. *Antapodosis* V, 15, ed. Becker, p. 138-139.

101. It should also be noted that the attack on Constantinople is set in the *Novgorod First Chronicle* before Oleg's death (922 in this text), despite the fact that the description goes back to the *Continuation of George the Monk* which indicated the exact year of the attack, 941. The author of the *Načal'nyj svod*, while borrowing the description, omitted the date, so that he could place the attack before Oleg's disappearance. The

In the first battle, in June, a few boats, including Igor's, split from the fleet of the Rus. Thus they were able to find their way to the coast of Thrace and eventually retreat to Kiev. The main force was pushed to the Asian coast of the Bosporus. As long as it kept in shallow waters close to the shore, the deep water Byzantine warships could not attack it. The Rus pillaged the coastal towns as far to the east as Paphlagonia; then a massive arrival of Byzantine ground troops confined them to the boats. In September, the Rus made a desperate attempt to break through to the coast of Thrace yet were repulsed with heavy casulties. The *Continuation of George the Monk* reports that the survivors fled during the night; it does not say where.[102] Since, however, the boats of the Rus were not made for crossing the sea and the way west was blocked, they could only sail along the east coast of the Black Sea, following the route which would take them to the Khazar stronghold in the strait of Kerch. If the Rus took to the sea in September, off the shore of Paphlagonia, they could barely reach Kerch before the winter made further sailing in the Black Sea too dangerous. Thus Oleg had little choice but to solicite his new allies, the Khazars, to provide him a safe harbor, while Igor was left for the entire fall, the winter and the spring to his own devices. During this time, I suppose, Oleg learned that he was no longer welcome in Kiev.

The *Letter* says that Oleg was ashamed to go back to his country after two defeats in a row. It implies that he wanted to recoup himself in another campaign. Yet there are signs that had he decided to return, Igor would not have made it easy. The repeated concessions of tribute to Svendel'd show an effort on Igor's part to secure his position against a possible threat. The first campaign of Igor's short reign, directed against the Uličans on the Lower Dniepr, put his army in just the right spot in order to prevent Oleg from sailing up the Dniepr to Kiev. Oleg, however, did not attempt a comeback by force, and one can understand why. His personal charisma was strong enough to keep the fidelity of his followers despite two severe failures, yet it would have been put to a harsh test if he were to make them fight against the "son of Rjurik", Igor, and their fellow Rus warriors who remained in Kiev. So Oleg decided to attack Persia instead. This itinerary is implicitely confirmed by the *Life of St. Basil the Younger* which indicates that the majority of the Rus who had fled from Asia Minor perished of diarrhea before they could get back to their country. The *Life* can only refer to the terrible stomach disease which was the main killer of the Rus in Bardha'a according to Miskawayh.[103]

Some observations on the invasion of Azerbaijan will conclude this study. Our main source, Miskawayh, dates the arrival of the Rus in the year of Hegira 332 (September 4, 943 to August 23, 944) and it was common, there-

best way to explain his procedure would be to admit that in the late eleventh century, when the *Načal'nyj svod* was compiled, people had not yet forgotten that the failed attack on Constantinople took place at the time of Igor's association with Oleg. This would be another instance of Russian oral tradition intervening in the adaptation of the translated Greek chronicle.

102. Ed. I. Bekker, Bonn 1838, p. 916.

103. The *Life*, ed. Veselovskij, p. 68, speaks of the Rus νόσῳ δεινῇ, ῥύσει χοιλίας περιπεσόντες.

fore, to set the invasion in 943/4.[104] Then it has been noticed that Miskawayh mentions in his narrative of the raid the death of Emir Tuzun which he dates in the following pages in August-September 945. To accord for this date, recent studies place the invasion in 945/6 and drop entirely the year indicated by Miskawayh.[105] This radical solution is hardly warranted. A careful reading of Miskawayh's account vindicates his chronology. The author makes it clear that the Rus stayed in Bardha'a for a long while — a source produced soon after the invasion indicates that it lasted for a year[106] — and that they evacuated the city about the time when the death of Tuzun became known.[107] The Rus arrived, no doubt, in the mid-summer 944 and left by September 945.

The Rus could not transfer their boats to the Caspian Sea without the Khazars' accord. What is more, an epic description of the raid produced by the famous Persian poet from Azerbaijan, Nizami, ca 1200 names the Burtas, the Alans and the Khazars as part of the army of the invading Rus. One cannot trust this late source for details yet, given the fact that Nizami spent his life on the Caspian, it surely refects the memory left by the raid in the local tradition. The participation of the Alans, the Khazars' closest allies, is independently confirmed by Bar Hebraeus. Thus there is every reason to believe that the Rus raided Bardha'a in alliance with the Khazars or at least with the latter's approval.[108]

In the same summer of 944 as a troop of the Rus attacked Bardha'a, the king of the Rus in Kiev, Igor, concluded a new treaty with Byzantium. Though less favorable than the treaty of 911, it reestablished the position of

104. Thus N. Ja. Polovoj, O date vtorogo pohoda Igorja na grekov i pohoda russkih na Berdaa, *VV* 14, 1958, p. 138-147, see p. 142-146, argues at length that the Rus stayed in Bardha'a from September-October 943 to March-April 944.

105. A. P. Novosel'cev, Rus' i gosudarstva Kavkaza i Azii, in V. T. Pašuto, *Vnešnjaja politika Drevnej Rusi*, Moscow 1968, p. 99-106, see p. 101-103; W. Madelung, The Minor Dynasties of Northern Iran, in R. N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, IV, Cambridge 1975, p. 198-249, see p. 233-234. This analysis apparently goes back to the study of A. Kasravî, *Shahriyârân-i gumnâm*, Teheran 1957, which was not available to me.

106. See the historical compilation written by al-Muṭahhar b. Tâhir al-Maḳdisî in 966, edited and translated by Cl. Huart under the title *Livre de la Création et de l'histoire attribué à Abou-Zéïd Aḥmed b. Sahl al-Balkhî*, Paris 1899-1919, IV, p. 66. The passage in question was first indicated by V. M. Bejlis, Narody Vostočnoj Evropy v kratkom opisanii Muṭahhara al-Maḳdisî (X v.), in A. S. Tveritinova (ed.), *Vostočnye istočniki po istorii narodov Jugo-Vostočnoj i Central'noj Evropy*, II, Moscow 1969, p. 304-311.

107. The Rus arrive in Bardha'a, smash the local forces, die in masses from diarrhea and yet repulse with success the attacks led by Marzubân ibn Muḥammad who had to conduct several levies to raise new troops. This part of Miskawayh's narrative covers the major part of their stay. Then Marzubân is recalled elsewhere, where he eventually learns of Tuzun's death. At the same time Marzubân's lieutenants keep putting presure on the surviving Rus who finally decide to retreat with their booty.

108. The evidence is analyzed by N. Ja. Polovoj, O maršrute pohoda russkih na Berdaa i russko-hazarskih otnošenijah v 943 g., *VV* 20, 1961, p. 90-105, see p. 92-98.

his kingdom as the Empire's trade partner and military ally.[109] If one assumes, as scholars do, that both actions emanated from the same authority, this chronological coincidence is troublesome. The animosity between the Khazars and Byzantium is attested to not only by the *Genizah Letter* (ca 949) but also in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De administrando imperio* (952) which mentions the danger of a Khazar attack on Cherson and lists the peoples who could be incited to fight Khazaria thus distracting it from raiding the Empire.[110] How is it then that the Rus ally themselves simultaneously with both these powers? The answers vary. Polovoj allied the Rus with Khazaria in 943 and then with Byzantium in 944, yet his solution was based on dating the raid on Bardha'a a year too early.[111] Novosel'cev once considered the raid as ultimately directed against Byzantium (the Rus allegedly looked towards attacking it by land across the Caucasus!), while in a recent study he presents it as a common undertaking of Byzantium and the Rus, the Khazars being irrelevant since too weak to oppose the passage of the Rus in the heart of their country. The latter interpretation would only be convincing, however, if there was any evidence for the collapse of the Khazar military power other than Novosel'cev's personal belief, however often stated.[112] The current impasse is epitomized in Litavrin's decision "to put aside" the Bardha'a episode, as if one could simply strike off the record.[113]

This contradiction is removed by the *Genizah Letter* which shows that the Rus of Oleg, who invaded Persia after the failed attack on Constantinople, never went back to Kiev and thus took no part in Igor's policy of reconci-

109. On the date and the circumstances of the treaty, see I. Sorlin, Les traités de Byzance avec la Russie au X^e^ siècle, *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 2, 1961, p. 313-360, 447-475, see p. 452-455. A. N. Saharov, *Diplomatija Drevnej Rusi (IX-pervaja polovina X v.)*, Moscow 1980, p. 209-258, is only useful as a bibliographical survey.

110. *De administrando imperio* 10-12, ed. Moravcsik-tr. Jenkins, p. 62-65. Those who can attack Khazaria are the Uzes, the Alans and the Black Bulgars.

111. Polovoj (cited n. 108). See also the confused excursus by Artamonov (cited n. 11), p. 375-384, who solves the problem by dividing Igor's army into Rus-the Slaves and Rus-the Scandinavians. Igor sets free the latter to attack Bardha'a and the Khazars let them through, despite Igor's alliance with Byzantium, because they recognize them as a distinct entity which can act "in contradiction to Igor's policy" and, in any case, are too scared of them to try to prevent their transit.

112. See Novosel'cev (cited n. 105), p. 102-103; idem (cited n. 5), p. 218-219. The thesis of Khazaria's military decline by the end of the ninth century is dear to the author (cited n. 5), p. 61, 100, 109, 133 etc. He dismisses out of hand the *Letter*'s and King Joseph's affirmations as to the strength of Khazaria in the mid-tenth century; Constantine VII's fear of a Khazar attack against the imperial territory does not impress Novosel'cev either. For a more balanced view of the Khazar power, see Th. S. Noonan, Byzantium and the Khazars: a special relationship?, in J. Shepard and S. Franklin (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy*, London 1992, p. 109-132.

113. G. G. Litavrin, Die Kiever Rus' und Byzanz im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 18, 1992, p. 43-59, see p. 56, n. 39: "Wir lassen hier bewusst den Kriegszug der Russen nach Berdaa beiseite, da der Versuch, eine Verbindung zwischen dieser militärischen Aktion und den byzantinisch-russischen Beziehungen herzustellen, wie er vielfach in der wissenschaftlichen Literatur unternommen wurde, uns sehr zweifelhaft erscheint."

liation with Byzantium. Two distinct forces follow their separate ways. The situation of Oleg and his people, in rupture with Kiev, explains the behavior of the Rus in Bardha'a which struck Miskawayh as highly unusual. Instead of pillaging the conquered city, the Rus declared to the inhabitants: "There is no dispute between us on the matter of religion; we only desire the sovereignty; it is our duty to treat you well and yours to be loyal to us."[114] The message could not be clearer: the Rus came to Bardha'a to stay. One needs a great deal of imagination in order to interpret the invasion of Azerbaijan as part of Igor's policy of expanding his empire from Ladoga in the north to the shores of the Caspian Sea.[115] In fact, the Rus who sought to establish their new home in Bardha'a did so because they had lost the old one, and only the stubborn resistance by the local population and army forced them to give up their initial conciliatory policy, to pass to outright pillage and, eventually, to retreat.

The chronicles manifest a total disarray as to the place and the circumstances of Oleg's death. The *Primary Chronicle* makes him die in Kiev and locates his tomb on the mount Ščekavica.[116] The author of the *Novgorod First Chronicle* knows of Oleg's tomb in Ladoga in the north yet admits that "others say" that Oleg went "beyond the sea" and died there.[117] The third tradition resembles the way Helgo's end is described in the *Genizah Letter*: "he went to Persia by sea and there he and all his troops fell (fol. 2r, 13)". While the chronicle only preserves a vague echo of the true events and the *Letter* is abrupt, the full story of Oleg's death is told by Miskawayh. After the Rus had been decimated by diarrhea, Marzubân ibn Muḥammad challeged them several times in field but was defeated each time. So he adopted a stratagem which consisted in staging a flight and drawing the Rus in ambush. The Rus charged on foot, as it was their custom, with their leader — who is not named in this text — riding a donkey. Oleg could hardly be any younger than sixty at that time and, understandably, he preferred to ride. In the ensuing skirmish, the leader of the Rus and seven hundred of his men were killed by Marzûban's troops. This is how Oleg perished under the walls of Bardha'a late in 944 or in the beginning of 945. By the end of the same winter, King Igor left Kiev with a small troop and attempted to raise the third tribute from the Derevlians in one year. The Derevlians captured him and tied to two trees pulled together. As they let the trees go free, Igor's body was torn to pieces.[118]

e. Epilogue

The beginning of the second decade of the tenth century is marked by two major events. At some date ca 910, the Khazars massacred the army of the

114. Tr. Margoliouth, p. 68.
115. This is, basically, the idea of Polovoj (cited n. 108).
116. Ed. Lihačev, p. 30.
117. Ed. Nasonov, p. 109.
118. The gory details of Igor's execution, passed over in silence by the Russian chronicles, are told by Leo Diaconus, ed. Hase, p. 106.

Rus returning with booty from a major raid in the Caspian. The Khazar king could blame the massacre on his Muslim mercenaries acting of their own accord, but the damage was already done. The way east which served the Rus, for trade more than for pillage, during the previous century could no longer be considered as safe. In 911, King Oleg concluded a treaty with Byzantium which provided for some military cooperation but mainly regularized, at very favorable terms, the access of the Rus traders to Constantinople. Perhaps Oleg took his action in order to secure an alternative market for the merchandise exported by the Rus after their traditional trade route was blocked. Perhaps, on the contrary, the Khazar king decided to put the Rus in their place after having learned of their dealing with Byzantium, his enemy. But even if there is no causal link between the two events, their coincidence is symptomatic. The growing affluence of Constantinople (the so-called "Macedonian revival") enhanced its commercial attraction for the Rus. The need to secure bases along the Dniepr drove the Rus into collision with the Khazars.

These changing alliances and the ensuing changes in the political geography of the modern-day Ukraine and Russia will be a subject of another article. The aim of the present study was to establish the chronology of the main actors, both Khazar and Rus.

The Khazars' conversion to Judaism can be dated ca 861. The Khazar-Jewish dynasty turns out to be shorter than one has previously believed. Four kings, Hezekiah, Menasheh, Isaac and another Menasheh, reign from the 860s to ca 900. Three kings occupy the Khazar throne in the first half of the tenth century. Benjamin probably reigns until at least ca 920. Aaron is succeeded by Joseph in the late 930s. Joseph then reigns until at least ca 955.

On the side of the Rus, Oleg is attested as king between 911 and 941. He loses supreme power in the course of the failed attack on Byzantium in the summer of 941 yet keeps a substantial number of followers with whom he tries a fresh start at Bardha'a in the summer of 944. This expedition fails and Oleg is killed in Azerbaijan in the winter 944/5. Oleg probably became king shortly before 911, since his subsequent career extends for more than thirty years. Igor, by contrast, reigned for less than four years, from the late summer of 941 to the beginning of 945.

The new chronology of Oleg's reign moves the creation of his first base on the Upper Dniepr, in Smolensk/Gnezdovo, the subsequent expansion down the Dniepr and the conquest of Kiev from the 880s-890s to the 910s-930s. The long years of excavations in Kiev have produced nothing, in fact, to indicate any importance of the site in the ninth century. Kiev's alleged standing as the capital of the Rus since 882 (the year of its capture by Oleg in the *Primary Chronicle*) has left no tangible traces.[119] The gap between the archaeological findings and the data of the written sources disappears once the latter are properly interpreted.

119. See M. Kazanski, L'apparition des centres proto-urbains et urbains chez les Slaves orientaux: état des recherches, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 32, 1989, p. 333-345, see p. 336.

This chronology calls for a revision of a deeply rooted view of the early Russian history. The emergence of the "Rus' of Kiev" is delayed by several decades. The Rus who attacked Constantinople in 860 can no longer be linked to Kiev; they came, no doubt, from farther north. Many other constructions and theories built on the chronicles' chronology fall apart. I want to emphasize once more, though, that my analysis of the Russian sources is hardly original. In preferring the text in the *Novgorod First Chronicle* to its adaptation in the *Primary Chronicle* and in rejecting the chronology of both, I did little more than apply to the writing of history the conclusions reached by generations of philologists.

And so it turns out that the original text employed in the *Novgorod First Chronicle* suggests the same chronology of the early reigns as that aberrant Hebrew document, the anonymous Khazar *Letter* from the Genizah of Cairo.

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